

## Charting the future: ADOT holds local meeting to take pulse of community

*By Bill Hess  
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SIERRA VISTA — Arizona cannot afford to wait until its population increases before addressing the state's transportation needs.

So, the Arizona Department of Transportation, through a contractor, is taking the pulse of communities throughout the state to see what will be needed from 2030 to 2050, when Arizona's population is expected to be well more than 14 million, twice what it is today.

One chart at Monday's Building a Quality Arizona focus meeting, indicated a trip from Benson to Flagstaff in 2005 took an average of five hours and 45 minutes. But, by 2050 the same car trip, though a heavily populated corridor, is estimated to take 15 hours and 15 minutes.

Another chart showed that the 200 square mile area of Sierra Vista, Hereford and Palominas will be a major population area by 2050, although the projected population numbers were not provided.

Laurel Parker, the senior project manager for DMJM Harris, the ADOT contractor, said the statewide transportation planning framework is designed to look at all of Arizona beyond "typical roadway needs."

There are many things that have to be considered when looking at how Arizonans are going to move around the state and how other people will go through the state in 22 to 42 years hence, she said.

Traffic congestion to include increasing commercial trucks, population growth, environmental concerns, economic considerations, safety, development pressures and undersized and insufficient road networks all have to be part of any planning process, Parker said.

And, not only will the state have to look at how the system is put together but so will local governments to ensure whatever ADOT does works with local connector systems and future funding needs to be addressed, she said.

The nearly 20 people — to include some from Douglas and Willcox — who attended the Cochise-Santa Cruz Focus Area workshop, were asked to breakdown into smaller groups to address two questions: What is your vision of the future of Arizona and your region? And, based on what you think the future holds, what are the transportation needs for your region?

Earlier Monday, Parker and others met with environmental, transportation and economic development groups.

After spending 40 minutes brainstorming their thoughts to the two questions the three groups at the evening meeting presented their views.

In general, there was a great deal of commonality in the views.

The members of the three groups recognized growth is going to happen and a transportation plan is needed now instead of after the growth comes.

Some of the groups' recommendations were:

- There need to be commercial corridors for trucks to use instead of roadways for the general public.
- There need to be better connections to Mexico, to include looking at improving ports of entry to ensure commercial traffic is routed to commercial corridors.
- Bypasses around metropolitan areas for commercial traffic are needed.
- There needs to be an equal treatment of rural areas instead of everything going to the main metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson.
- Improve the existing rail system to include constructing more lines.
- Willcox was seen as an agricultural hub for commercial moving of products meaning a better transportation plan will be required to move the goods.
- Benson will be a bedroom community for Tucson requiring a light rail system connecting the two.
- More mass transportation is needed.
- Better use of regional airports to help move traffic instead of having people drive to larger airports.
- A need to look at telecommunications as a way for people to get work done instead of having to drive from one area to another to accomplish a job.

Parker said the object of the focus groups, which have been used throughout the state, is to provide planners with ideas so when they start development they have an idea what the citizens want.

"It's always good to plan, especially for the future," she said.

To give your input, visit [www.bqaz.com](http://www.bqaz.com).

Herald/Review senior reporter Bill Hess can be reached at 515-4615 or by e-mail at [bill.hess@svherald.com](mailto:bill.hess@svherald.com).